

THAT BIG DEAL WITH THE RUSSIANS

A Realistic Look at the New Realism

PETER MEYER

AS THE years of the cold war lengthen, America grows weary and peevish with the demands made upon her energy, steadfastness, and capacity for sacrifice. If only the fact of an aggressive world Communist movement were not there to interrupt our practice of the arts of peace and poison our ease! More and more, on every side, we see efforts to blink this fact.

There are the Little Budgeteers and the Big Budgeteers. The Little Budgeteers assure one fatuously that the Leninist strategy aims at making us spend ourselves into bankruptcy; they even pretend that Lenin actually uttered such nonsense, putting quotation marks around the phrase. Save, save, save, they cry, the Communist threat is mainly internal. They are ready to defend the free world—but only if it doesn't cost too much. The Big Budgeteers cry spend, spend, spend

AFTER twenty years of vigorous idealism culminating in the victorious crusade against Nazism, Americans, says PETER MEYER, are now showing a tendency to lend their ears to the persuasions of "realists": reactionary ones who would prefer to let the world go hang, relying on the Policy of the Big Bang—the atomic bomb—to keep us safe; and liberal and conservative ones urging the Policy of the Big Deal—a negotiated settlement with the Soviet Union that, we are told, will put an end to the cold war. In his article Mr. Meyer is chiefly concerned with this second kind of "realism," as it is popularly represented in Theodore H. White's recent book, *Fire in the Ashes*. Mr. Meyer is well known to COMMENTARY readers as an authority on international Communism; his article "Soviet Anti-Semitism in High Gear" appeared in our February 1953 issue. He is co-author of the recently published *Jews in the Soviet Satellites* (Syracuse University Press), a study sponsored by the Library of Jewish Information of the American Jewish Committee.

—to buy the good will of friends and enemies alike, with, of course, "no strings attached" (one doesn't "dictate" to an ally) that might bind our friends into a common military defense against a common enemy. Anyhow, the enlightened know that not guns but the standard of living decides.

THE chorus of retreat and capitulation—though it is of course not called that—swells louder and louder. One recent and persistent note in all this uproar is that sounded by the advocates of the Big Deal: these neo-realists, coming from both the "left" and "right," warn us against immature moralizing over Communism and urge a "live and let live" policy. *Fire in the Ashes*, Theodore H. White's new book on Europe, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection published by Sloane Associates, is a popularized and persuasive statement of this Big Deal point of view and a well-calculated appeal to the present American mood of weariness and impatience.

Mr. White paints the socio-political portraits of present-day France, Germany, and England, the leading figures on the European stage; his book is both well written and well informed. The basic attitudes of these nations, the main characteristics of their social structure, the problems of their political systems, and the determinants of their foreign policy, are analyzed lucidly and coherently. The book also contains a quite remarkable survey of the history, achievements, and problems of the Marshall Plan, the NATO military alliance, and the plans for European integration.

One may quarrel with many details, but on the whole the author's description of events and tendencies in Western Europe is persuasive. It is only when it comes to the

Soviet Union and world Communism that Mr. White's analytical powers and insight seem to desert him. What is wanting is any understanding that the Soviet problem is more than a psychological or public-relations one, that behind the misunderstanding, appetite for discipline, captiousness, and morbid fears which Mr. White adduces, there may be massive social forces impelling the Soviet system along its expansive course.

According to Mr. White, the great danger of Communism is "not the evil but the attraction of it." The "magic appeal" of Communism is simple: it is the belief that "pure logic," when applied to human affairs, is enough to change the world and abolish all its troubles. The "fatal flaw" of such a credo, Mr. White contends, is that human beings tend to be illogical. It is to correct this illogicality that Communism must impose its rigid discipline. Any political organization striving to be totally logical requires a total discipline; total discipline requires an omnipresent police, which in turn leads to total terror. The weakness of Communism lies "less in the calculated immorality of terror than in the endless appetite of discipline." The area of discussion shrinks, fewer and fewer men have access to the facts, the leadership becomes less and less capable of wise decisions—all this leading to great blunders.

THERE is of course some truth to this description. But is this the gravamen of our charge against Communism? Has a democrat no more fault to find than this, that Communism is guilty of overweening pretensions to logicity? Surely not. Mr. White's argument rather accepts uncritically the Communists' own rationalization of their system: terror is needed to force people to act "according to their logical interests."

Discipline does not beget the Soviet system of exploitation, terror, and expansion; rather is it one of its features, one of its operative means. Blind discipline is needed to hold together a society riven by deep inner conflicts, a regime whose promise is almost absolutely contradicted by its reality. Communist logic is a kind of insanity.

A heretical Communist may see the main evil of the Soviet system in its "excessive" discipline. But men whose criticism of Soviet society goes beyond Trotsky's and Tito's are more concerned about "the calculated immorality of terror" which murders millions of people in the jails and concentration camps than about the stupefying effect of discipline on the brains of Communist leaders.

It is not enough to be "against" Communism. We need to understand its driving forces. We face a crucial question: either Soviet expansion is basically a result of misunderstandings, self-imposed misinformation, excessive discipline, fatal blunders by the Soviet leaders, their morbid fears and hysteria—in which case a policy of psychotherapeutic patience, combining negotiation and concession, is called for, animated by the hope that the compulsive, overdisciplined, expansionist generation in the Kremlin will in time be replaced by more secure, easygoing, and moderate men. Or else the expansion, the striving for world domination, is a basic feature of world Communism and the Soviet system—in which case the free world must be prepared to defend itself until such time as the Soviet system collapses or is overthrown by a combination of pressure from without and the revolutionary pressures it generates within.

THERE is little doubt that Mr. White holds with the first alternative. Thus, in describing the opening of the East-West rift in '45, he would seem to imply that it was mainly due to a misunderstanding: Churchill and Stalin had divided up their spheres of influence in the Balkans, giving Rumania to the Soviet Union and Greece to England. But when Vishinsky "journeyed down to Bucharest to take possession of the prize deeded to Russia in Moscow," the Americans began to stamp and shout, and "this obscure incident" must have been "one of the initial shocks" to Russian diplomacy. It evoked Soviet suspicion, a "morbid," "hysterical" suspicion, to be sure, but one—the context implies—which was not entirely groundless. The Russians thought that they

had made a business deal at Yalta; but America suddenly began to take the words "democracy" and "free elections" literally, and to interpret them in a way the Russians could not understand.

Is not this theory of misunderstanding an oversimplification, to say the least? It closes its eyes to the entire history of world Communism. It ignores the plain fact that a final clash with "world capitalism" has always been envisaged in the Communist program. It overlooks the fact that the Soviet government was preparing its postwar expansion during the period of the Soviet-Nazi pact, as well as during its wartime alliance with Western powers; its every step, from building up Communist partisan movements in Yugoslavia, Greece, and Albania which did their best to exterminate the pro-Western resistance forces, to Soviet espionage in Washington, aimed at extending the Soviet empire.

Certainly, the Communist leaders made many mistakes, and Mr. White gives us a long list of them, from China in 1927 to Yugoslavia in 1948. I too think that nothing is more foolish than to attribute infallible cunning and powers of calculation to the rulers of the Kremlin. They often behave stupidly, succeeding only because of the bigger blunders of their ignorant and timid adversaries. But whatever their blunders, the will to world power was never missing, and the will to use every means towards it.

And the prophets of "relaxation" in Russia have behind them a series of errors and false predictions matching Mr. White's catalogue of Stalinist stupidities. They saw the approaching self-liquidation of Communist dictatorship in Lenin's New Economic Policy in 1921; they expected the end of Communist subversion and revolution from Trotsky's elimination and the triumph of Stalin's doctrine of "socialism in one country" in 1924; they predicted the coming democratization of Russia when Stalin's "liberal" constitution was proclaimed in 1936, just before the Great Purge; they even thought that the extermination of Old Bolsheviks in the purge heralded an era of peaceful coexistence. They saw Communism passing out of its aggres-

sive "phase" with the Soviet entry into the League of Nations, in the Popular Front tactics, in the wartime dissolution of the Comintern. They were deceived—and served to deceive others—so often that one might think they would be more careful in 1954.

In the 20's and 30's, Lenin and Trotsky were described as dogmatic fanatics, and Stalin with his fellow bureaucrats as the realistic conservatives. Today, Mr. White—and many others—represent Stalin as the evil genius who, with his dogmatism and hysterical suspicions, drove Russia into internal crises and foreign expansion, while the new generation, represented by Malenkov, is middle-aged, conservative, and on the whole content with what it has. After all, most of these men are engineers and administrators, the Russian opposite number of Western businessmen. It is Mr. White's hope and expectation that these men will bring about a relaxation in foreign policy and military pressure. "For an indefinite number of months and years, the Western world may find itself face to face with a more relaxed Russia."

But the Stalinist generation was also middle-aged when it rose to power in the late 20's. And it, too, was made up largely of engineers and administrators eager to enjoy their new material privileges and develop the resources of the country now under their domination. They wanted to "live better and happier" and would have chosen a quieter life—if they could have. But the totalitarian regime is shot through with contradictions: slave and semi-slave labor is of low productivity; the absence of democratic economic and political controls encourages snowballing errors in planning, parasitism, and wastage on a tremendous scale. The bitter exploitation to which the majority are subjected demands a huge, expensive, and unproductive machinery of suppression; the ever widening gulf between promises and realities has to be filled with scapegoats, at home and abroad, and leads to recurrent purges that further disorganize society. The concentration of all the resources of society

in a single hand can produce spectacular results in some respects, but only at the price of huge disproportions. One of these disproportions—between the development of industry and agriculture—drove the Stalin regime into the adventure of wholesale collectivization in the early 1930's, which in turn helped bring about the crisis that ended in the great purges of the later 1930's. When Nikita Khrushchev recently lifted a corner of the veil of secrecy over the true facts of the Soviet economy, the surprised world learned that collectivization had not solved but rather aggravated the basic problem: after thirty years of much trumpeted progress, "modernized" Soviet agriculture was maintaining less live stock and producing less animal food than in 1916.

The "limitless expansion" always envisaged by bureaucratic planning in the USSR is not only rendered illusory by the natural limits of manpower, food, and raw materials; it is also frustrated by obstacles of a social and economic character. The Soviet system cannot eliminate the wastage of lives and goods incident upon the exploitation of unfree labor. It cannot eliminate bureaucratic misplanning and parasitism. The evils of "bureaucratism" are incessantly attacked in party resolutions and in purges, but continue to multiply as long as democratic controls are excluded. And how could they not be, since to admit them would mean the beginning of the end for the dictatorship?

In the early 30's, the crisis in economic relations between town and countryside, caused by the city's not producing enough goods to offer the peasants in exchange for their agricultural products, was "solved" by collectivizing the independent peasants; in the late 30's, the manpower shortage was "relieved" by the mass conscription of slave labor; and the economic breakdown at the end of the war was "overcome" by looting the satellite countries. Thus every new economic crisis was met by extending totalitarian controls over new classes or countries. Mr. White thinks it was only sheer stupidity that made the Kremlin turn the satellites into slums instead of keeping them as show-

windows of Soviet prosperity. But he is wrong. The Soviet ruling class *needed* the factories, the products, and the manpower of these countries to prop up Russia's tottering economic system. And the Kremlin could not allow the "half-socialist" People's Democracies to enjoy standards of living that were luxurious when compared with those of a Russia that was supposed to be in the "higher stage of Communism."

The Soviet leaders simply cannot act "sensibly" if to do so means to change the structure of Soviet society or to compromise their own basic interests.

IN ESTIMATING the temper of the new generation of Soviet rulers, the realities of the culture and society in which they grew up must be taken into account. They were educated in fear and brutality; they could rise only at the expense of masses of other human beings, and only by suppressing every feeling of loyalty and sympathy within themselves. The biography of every one of them is a record of intrigues, deceptions, denunciations, murders. The thing they cherish most is power—collective power for their class and state, personal power for themselves. Beria's execution, the mass arrests in Eastern Germany, the permanent terror in China and North Korea, show how little has changed since Stalin's departure.

As yet the Soviet Union has not surrendered a single real position in her foreign policy. At the recent Berlin meeting of Foreign Ministers, Molotov flatly refused to yield an inch on Germany, Austria, or anywhere else. The dictatorship in Russia and the satellites has not been eased a jot; the present policy of granting economic concessions to the consumers only repeats Lenin's strategy of partial retreat as expressed in the NEP: make temporary economic concessions, at the same time strengthen the dictatorship and sharpen the terror. It is designed only to prepare the way for a further tightening of the reins, with the driver in a securer seat. The Soviet rulers could perhaps be compelled to retreat further than they intend if the free world were united, resolved

to press every advantage, and aware of the fact that, not the new generation of bureaucrats, but their victims, are its friends within the Soviet empire. Do we need more than ordinary common sense to recognize that if the free world relaxes, putting its hopes on the good non-political "engineers" in the Politburo, this will only serve to reconsolidate their power and invite new aggression on their part?

This is the light in which we have to look at Mr. White's practical proposals. He stresses that American strategy cannot be merely defensive, but must also be offensive, and there can be little quarrel about that; but his practical application of this principle is dubious, to say the least.

Mr. White's main defensive recommendation is to stop further European rearmament! The NATO, it is true, provides but a thin screen of defense that could, at best, hold only the advance echelon of the Soviet armies, and that only on the condition that the twelve German divisions provided for in the European Defense Treaty enter the picture soon. But Mr. White thinks that NATO's present forces offer a sufficient shield, and he would not bother about the German divisions, but would devote all available means to economic improvement. This is the old slogan of butter against guns. What is strange is that so many of its present advocates never recommended it when the guns were Hitler's. True, a hungry country cannot defend itself well, but countries with relatively high standards of living have succumbed many times in the past to poorer enemies because they were too lazy and too selfish to provide an adequate defense for themselves.

As for the "offensive approach" recommended by Mr. White, its aim is to win over the communities that lie between the Atlantic-American and the Soviet bloc, meaning the nations of Asia and Africa. Again, the end is laudable but the means very chancy. Should we support and organize the forces that are ready to join with us, or should we give them up and woo the neutralists instead, and even some of our present

enemies, in hopes of weaning the latter away from Russia? Mr. White recommends the second way.

First, he tells us, people in Asia are not ripe for democracy. World problems "cannot be resolved by the vote of illiterate peasants." The governments imposed on these people persist and succeed only insofar as they claim the loyalty of the conscious few and offer outlets to their ambition. All that backward peoples ask is that the governments they are saddled with at least appear to be their own, not those of alien white men, and that they bring some tiny visible improvements in their daily life. Freedom, as it developed in the West, is according to Mr. White "a unique growth." It does not suit Asia and Africa—although it "may" develop there "later."

This does not read as if written by a man with deep democratic convictions. It makes democracy a rare flower, and leaves four-fifths of the world to dictatorships. At first glance, it might seem a plea for Syngman Rhee and Chiang Kai-shek—but this is not at all what Mr. White means. His "ambitious few" are the Communists; he concludes with a plea for a "basic strategy" that would try to "magnetize" Red China away from Russia.

THE first "offensive" move in his plan is to abandon Indochina. France should negotiate directly with Ho Chi Minh, even "if it means that Indochina must be split in two as most countries on the Communist border are."

But really, is this possible? In Indochina, where the war is largely a guerrilla one, there is not one front, one demarcation line, as in Korea. To establish an armistice line would mean in practice to evacuate French and Vietnamese garrisons from cities and ports north of the line, while Communist infiltration south of the line would be stepped up. This could only result—very quickly—in the complete loss of the country. It would seem that this is what Mr. White really has in mind, for he asserts, a few lines later, that his policy would "liquidate a colonial domain repulsive to South-East Asian communities."

This, he feels, would "bring about a general peace," but it is only too evident that the opposite is true: the fall of Thailand and Burma would come next, followed by attacks on Indonesia and India. Why Mao should abandon his alliance with Russia just when it has helped him to conquer one half of Asia and promises him easy conquest of the other half—this is a mystery Mr. White does not explain. Like all advocates of Chinese appeasement, he contents himself with some vague phrases about "magnetizing away" the Chinese from the Russians, "natural strains reasserting themselves," etc. For this, the West is to give Asia to Mao, with economic aid attached!

The second "offensive" move proposed by Mr. White is to call off German rearmament and give up on the European Defense Treaty in exchange for Russia's consenting to German reunification. A united Germany, Mr. White feels, would be solidly rooted in the European community, while Western Germany, with twelve divisions under Allied command, might go over to Russia. This is a strange view—a defenseless Germany, with the East German Communist apparatus intact inside her, is supposed to be more resistant to Russian threats than a moderately armed West Germany making part of the European Community. This is also to disregard the possibility that a united Germany might one day rearm without seeking the permission of the Western powers, who could not oppose such rearmament without driving Germany into the arms of Russia. However you turn Mr. White's proposal, it would seem to work to Soviet advantage.

IT is useful at this point to take a backward glance at the well-known *Thunder Out of China*, of which Mr. White was the co-author and which appeared some years ago, also as a Book-of-the-Month Club choice. It too was a well-done job, combining vivid first-hand stories with much background material, and some sharp criticism of the reactionary features of Chinese society. But it also contained such statements as: "those who visited Communist territories

escaped from the oppression of the Kuomintang into what seemed an area of light." Mr. White thought that the Chinese Communists "have been more democratic than the Kuomintang" and that they "sought peace" in the civil war. One could learn from his book that Russia's attitude toward China "had been one of impeccable aloofness" until "our policy" produced the "monstrous result" of "ranging her on the side of the Communists against the United States." In other words, this excellent piece of popular reporting contained a lot of misinformation, and the advice Mr. White and people like him had to offer proved disastrous.

In 1946, when *Thunder Out of China* first appeared, the greater part of China and even a part of Manchuria were in the National government's hands and the struggle for the country was still far from decided. For America, there were two possible courses. One was to give the National government all feasible economic and military support against the Communists, exacting, as the price of that support, far-reaching agrarian, fiscal, and administrative reforms. Proof that such a policy was possible is to be found in the belated American experience in South Korea and Formosa, where the local regimes have been compelled to introduce effective administrative and land reforms. In 1946, much more American pressure and assistance would have been required, but the results would also have been much greater.

Mr. White and others counselled differently: America should halt her military aid to the Chinese government and force the Kuomintang into a coalition with the Communists, who though participating in the central administration would be allowed to maintain their local governments and local armies. The example of Eastern Europe, where such coalition governments cleared the way for the harsh Communist dictatorships, did not deter Mr. White.

The kind of policy Mr. White recommended was actually adopted. General Marshall tried to get Chiang Kai-shek to accept a coalition with Mao; when he refused, American military aid was temporarily suspended.

Was this defeat inevitable? In spite of many declamations that "it is impossible to halt the revolution . . . in China and Asia," Mr. White considered a defeat of Chinese Communists possible—but *not desirable*. In an eloquent passage he conceded that a "total victory of the Kuomintang" was feasible with massive American help. So reunified, China might have had a "flourishing industry," "expanding railways," "rising factories"; but it would have been a "historic monstrosity" and a "menace to all the Orient." Such a China would have possessed all the skills of modern science, but "under the direction of men rooted in the barbarism of feudal antiquity. . . ." Today in Communist China the tools of modern science are wielded by men steeped in the more modern, cruel, and dangerous barbarism of the totalitarian kind.

IN *Fire in the Ashes*, American foreign policy is again exhorted not to conduct crusades, but rather to make deals. The kind of deals Mr. White has in mind, we saw a few pages back. What sort of philosophy lies behind these counsels of retreat? It is by no means Mr. White's philosophy alone. It borrows something from George F. Kennan's trenchant criticism of American moralism and legalism, and his advocacy of a policy based upon realistic national interest. It takes something from the preachments of a whole school of commentators from Walter Lippman to Vera Micheles Dean. Our question is, how realistic is this "realism"?

In the 19th century, political life developed within national states and limited empires. Their interests clashed, but the conflicts could be solved by compromises; these sometimes prevented wars, and sometimes concluded them. No state or empire was strong enough to conquer the whole world, and conquest did not mean the complete enslavement or extinction of the conquered nation. As a rule, only revolutions and counter-revolutions were fought to the bitter end. Civil wars, in those days, were accounted the cruelest form of warfare.

All this changed with the emergence of the possibility of "one world" and with the

rise of totalitarian empires aiming at the unification of the whole world in total slavery. In the 20th century, a policy of limited "national interest" has ceased to be adequate. After all, the supreme national interest is the survival of the nation in freedom and independence. Or, even more minimally, survival. But totalitarian movements always threaten the independence, and very often the survival, of other nations.

It was so under the Nazis. What deals in their "national interest" could the Poles, Czechs, and French have made with Hitler? Colonel Beck, President Hácha, and Marshal Pétain sought some kind of arrangement; they are regarded as traitors. The national interest of all these nations—and of the Russians, British, and Americans as well—required a "crusade," that is to say, complete victory over the Nazi regime, a war waged for liberation, and until liberation. And thus the realistic fight for survival became part of a world crusade against Nazism. One isn't likely to be challenged about this when speaking of the Nazis. How is the Russian drive for world domination different?

But cannot the fight against the totalitarian menace stop halfway? After the Thirty Years' War, the antagonists "abandoned their crusading and resigned themselves to adjustments," writes Mr. White, "permitting each ruler domestically to impose his religion on his own people in his own way." So should we, the implication is clear, resign ourselves to Malenkov's and Mao's imposing their rule on "their own" people in "their own way," from Czechoslovakia to Indochina.

THIS raises a moral question—one should like to say "agonizing" if neo-realism had not made such phrases seem in bad taste. Confronted with this moral question, all our realists have a callous and cynical sound to them. We have heard Mr. White argue that freedom and democracy make no sense in Asia and Africa; we can read the same theory, supported by pseudo-Marxist arguments, in Aneurin Bevan's *In Place of Fear*: only dictatorships of the Communist type

can secure the necessary original accumulation of capital in backward countries. Yesterday the populations of the European satellite countries, today the masses of Asia, are declared too primitive to know and enjoy freedom. But there is freedom and freedom. It is not simply democratic political institutions that the deal with Communism sacrifices. Totalitarian tyranny is something qualitatively different from old-fashioned absolutism. To live under the Soviets does not mean just to lose one's vote and voice in public matters. The Big Deal means the degradation of 800 million people—merciless economic exploitation and psychological mass coercion for the great majority, death in slave labor camps for millions, execution for hundreds of thousands, the extermination of entire social, ethnic, and religious groups. Nobody with a bit of conscience can regard such a deal light-mindedly.

Still, it might perhaps be justified if the only alternative were a global war bringing still greater sufferings to mankind—if, that is, the deal did in fact prevent war.

But that is just the trouble: the deal is *not* realistic. It leads straight on to what it wishes to avoid. In the 20th century the rule, *cuius regio, eius religio*, is not only reactionary but also utopian. In the 17th century, economic and political problems were still largely local in reference, and Catholicism and Protestantism could survive in sullen and relative separation until time and tide made other issues more paramount. But today the world is more close knit than in the 17th century, and it is impossible to "transcend" the question of freedom or slavery as the denominational issue was transcended.

This is so not because the free are going to start a war to liberate the slaves, but because the totalitarian slaveholders will not halt their drive to enslave the free. The Soviet regime and the Communist movement are committed to the conquest of the world; only complete domination can end what they call "capitalist encirclement."

Does this mean "preventive war"? By no

means. Mr. White simplifies the controversy to the point of falsification. Anyone against his deal is for a crusade, and "of the crusade as foreign policy little need be said." Crusade, "under whatever name it masquerades," whether "Rollback," "Liberation," or "Preventive Attack," means war, "war at the earliest opportunity" and without allies. It also means black repression at home. . . .

This picture has as much in common with reality as a cartoon in *Krokodil*. Mr. White would be hard put to it to name one serious and influential advocate of war "at the earliest opportunity" regardless of the wishes of our allies—though there are many responsible supporters of the policy of liberation.

WHAT Mr. White describes as a "crusade" actually means something else: the recognition of the inescapable central fact of the present world situation, namely, that the existence of a totalitarian empire and world movement is fundamentally and essentially irreconcilable with the security of the free world. At the end of a historical period whose exact length nobody can predict, the struggle must end either with the extinction of the free world or with the destruction of the Communist system. This may come about as the result of a war, if the Communists press matters to that conclusion, or of the disintegration of one of the opposing systems. Hence the necessity that the free world stand permanently ready to arms lest a war be suddenly forced upon it: it must conduct its policies in such a way as to fortify and consolidate its own forces, and disrupt and dismay the enemies'. This certainly does not preclude partial deals and limited agreements, when these secure our position. But the big deal which sacrifices forever our best potential allies, the victims of Soviet exploitation and terror, and stimulates illusions of security, can only weaken the free and strengthen the totalitarian camp. It is a sell-out in exchange for the promissory note of a power that has defaulted on every deal it ever made.